

Message Text

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42

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-10

/065 W

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R 130550Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9255

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 1326

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT MY

SUBJ: JAMES WONG RELEASED THEN RE-ARRESTED UNDER ISA

REF: KL 1253

1. SUMMARY: SARAWAK NATIONAL PWWTY (SNAP) LEADER DATUK JAMES WONG WAS RELEASED FROM DETENTION BY THE BORNEO HIGH COURT MARCH 11 BUT IMMEDIATELY RE-ARRESTED UNDER THE FEDERAL INTERNAL SECURITY ACT (ISA). WONG WAS FLOWN BACK TO PENINSULAR MALAYSIA FOR DETENTION. HIS LEGAL COUNSEL HAS FILED ANOTHER APPLICATION FOR A WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS. THE EMBASSY FEELS THAT THE DECISION TO CONTINUE TO DETAIN WONG, A POPULAR AND GENERALLY RESPECTED FIGURE, ON GROUNDS WHICH ARE GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO BE SPURIOUS, IS A MISTAKE ON THE GOVERNMENT'S PART. END SUMMARY.

2. AS REPORTED REFTTEL, SNAP LEADER JAMES WONG WAS RELEASED IN KUCHING ON THE MORNING OF MARCH 11 ON THE RULING OF THE BORNEO HIGH COURT THAT HIS ARREST OCT 30 WAS UNLAWFUL. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, DATUK JAMES WAS RE-ARRESTED FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER
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BY THE ACTING HEAD OF SPECIAL BRANCH IN KUCHING AS HE STEPPED

FROM THE COURTROOM. ACCORDING TO SARAWAK TRIBUNE, WONG'S RE-ARREST WAS WITNESSED BY A CROWD OF SEVERAL HUNDRED INCLUDING HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN. HE WAS FLOWN BACK TO KUALA LUMPUR SHORTLY THEREAFTER IN AN RMAF AIRCRAFT. (PRESUMABLY WONG WILL BE DETAINED ONCE AGAIN AT THE KAMUNTING DETENTION CAMP NEAR TAIPING IN PERAK.) REPORTS FROM KUCHING STATE THAT WONG'S COUNSEL, DAVID MARSHALL FILED ANOTHER APPLICATION FOR A WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS WITH THE BORNEO HIGH COURT THAT SAME EVENING. THE DATE FOR A HEARING HAS NOT BEEN ANNOUNCED.

3. COMMENT: IT IS DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND THE RATIONALE FOR WONG'S RE-ARREST UNDER THE ISA WHEN IT SEEMS TO BE THE CONSENSUS OF KNOWLEDGEABLE OBSERVERS THAT THERE WERE REALLY NO GROUNDS TO CONVICT HIM UNDER THE SARAWAK PRESERVATION OF PUBLIC SECURITY REGULATIONS (PPSR). HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW, MICHAEL BONG TOLD EMBOFFS IN EARLY FEBRUARY THAT THE FAMILY BELIEVED ARREST WAS PURELY ACT OF SARAWAK CHIEF MINISTER DATUK HAJI ABDUL RAHMAN YA'KUB ANGERED BY SNAP'S SUCCESSES IN 1974 ELECTIONS AND THAT FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WAS EMBARRASSED BY IT. WONG'S DETENTION IN KAMUNTING RATHER THAN IN SARAWAK WAS ASCRIBED BY BONG TO GOM'S DESIRE TO PROTECT HIM FROM RAHMAN YA'KUB. GOVT'S PERSISTENCE IN WHAT MUST SEEM TO MANY TO BE PERSECUTION OF A WELL-KNOWN AND REPUTABLE FORMER MEMBER OF THE SARAWAK SUPREME COUNCIL MAKES LITTLE SENSE EXCEPT IN THE CONTEXT OF AN ALL OUT CAMPAIGN BY GOM AGAINST OPPOSITION PARTIES. IN OUR VIEW, WONG'S RE-ARREST IS MORE LIKELY TO STRENGTHEN SUPPORT AMONG SARAWAK CHINESE AND IBANS FOR SNAP AND WEAKEN RAHMAN YA'KUB'S NATIONAL FRONT COALITION, PARTICULARLY THE CHINESE-BASED SARAWAK UNITED PEOPLE'S PARTY (SUPP).
UNDERHILL

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